

Overview

Evidence is growing of the value of the services and support that faith-based and community organizations offer to people with mental illnesses. These groups often contribute to recovery by promoting hope and by offering solace and comfort in troubled times. However, not all organizations are equally welcoming or knowledgeable about how best to serve people with mental disorders. Further, mental health professionals often overlook the role of faith, spirituality, and religion when working with consumers.

To consider how to develop accepting, healing, supportive partnerships, a group of mental health consumers and representatives of faith-based and community organizations met in Baltimore, Maryland, in October 2002. CMHS sponsored this dialogue to explore ways to build relationships between mental health consumers and members of faith and community organizations to promote recovery from mental illnesses.

The dialogue's participants reflected the diversity of the Judeo-Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and other traditions. They also represented a wide range of cultural, racial, ethnic, geographical, gender, and age backgrounds. During the course of a two-day, facilitated roundtable discussion, these participants explored many of the interpersonal and systems-level issues that help or hinder recovery. At times, this exploration was painful, yet revealing. The participants also developed a series of recommendations to promote positive relationships between consumers and community and faith-based organizations.

“My responsibility is to help the congregations and seminaries of America to become familiar with physical, sensory, or mental disability. I work with priests, rabbis, ministers, and imams. Congregations want to do a good job, but they don’t know how to do it.”
(Community organizer)